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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 March 1970

ADDENDUM TO: Report to the Board of the Working Group on
Soviet Military Estimates
(Internal ONE Distribution Only)

1. Since the meeting of the Working Group on 25 March, we have received Secretary Laird's response to the DCI on the subject of the military estimates (attached). We agree with most of the propositions advanced by the Secretary (which have also been suggested by others). The proposals in our Report to the Board of 26 March, we feel, would meet most of his requests. In our view, however, two of his requests should be satisfied in ways other than changing the NIE's.

2. Secretary Laird proposes that "The estimates, especially the strategic attack and defense papers, should be revised and updated more often, perhaps quarterly." We oppose this scheme on the following grounds:

- (a) To the extent that a need exists for more frequent updating of the strategic papers,

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it is already being met (at least for high-level consumers) by the President's Quarterly Report. This document is coordinated with DIA and State, and therefore ranks as national intelligence.

- (b) In our experience, the basic judgments in the strategic NIEs change slowly over time as the result of an accumulation of bits and pieces of evidence, analysis in depth, and prolonged haggling. There are not ordinarily in any given quarter enough newsworthy events to warrant a re-do of the estimates (or even, for that matter, publication of the PQR). Any truly momentous event can be handled by either a SNIE or a Memorandum to Holders.
- (c) Unless we adopted a looseleaf format, which does not seem to appeal to the DCI, more frequent updating of the strategic estimates

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would pose formidable problems of production and coordination. The practical effect would be to convert the military estimates from a periodic to a continuous exercise.

3. We also oppose Secretary Laird's proposal that each NIE have a section comparing previous judgments with current ones which would show "any tendency to consistently over-estimate or under-estimate."

- (a) We have already been moving in this direction by pointing up changes in major judgments and giving in greater detail the reasons for such changes.
- (b) Adoption of this proposal in file would put us in the position of sitting in judgment on ourselves. Even if we could do so in an unbiased fashion, any conclusions we reached would be automatically suspect.

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- (c) In many cases, such judgments are simply not possible; things predicted have not yet come to pass and hence verification is impossible. In others, perfectly good estimates can come to look bad because the Soviets change their plans as a result of US actions or other changes in the military or political situation confronting them.
- (d) The task of coordinating such a section would be formidable.

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